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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 003207

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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: WOMEN READY TO LEAD

REF: A. AMMAN 2985
[1](#)B. AMMAN 1410
[1](#)C. AMMAN 1703
[1](#)D. AMMAN 3126

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Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Women candidates and their supporters have been eagerly awaiting Jordan's July 31 municipal elections. The municipalities reform law endorsed by Parliament in April established a 20 percent quota for women in municipal councils (ref A), engendering extensive interest among potential women candidates. The quota was a major factor that encouraged 355 women to run for seats on municipal councils and 6 for mayoralities, (or 361 women out of a total of 2706 candidates) and untold numbers of others to get involved in the process. More than 200 women will be elected to municipal council seats on July 31, a stark contrast to the 46 candidates and five victors in the 2003 elections. NOTE: Following the poor showing by women in the 2003 election, the government selected 97 women to fill seats it appointed. END NOTE. Even the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, is running women candidates in contrast to past elections. END SUMMARY.

Quota Mechanics

[1](#)2. (SBU) According to Ministry of Municipal Affairs Elections Advisor Abdulilah Al Hunaiti, each seat reserved under the quota will be allocated based on which woman gets the highest percentage of votes in her district. Thus, hypothetically a woman who gets 500 out of 2500 total votes (20 per cent) in a small district will outrank a rival in another district who gets 1000 votes out of 10,000 (10 per cent). The candidate with 20 percent of the vote in her district would be more likely to become a council member than the one with 10 percent. Hunaiti refuted a rumor that there was a ten percent threshold to activate the quota, instead saying it would be possible for a woman with only one vote to win a seat under the quota system. Hunaiti also confirmed that it was theoretically possible that a municipal council could have 100 percent women members because a woman candidate who wins a seat outright by receiving the necessary number of votes in a given district does not "use up" any of the seats reserved for women.

Embassy Support Paves the Way for Success

[1](#)3. (SBU) USAID funded an International Republican Institute

(IRI) project that organized candidate training schools in the run-up to the municipal elections. Since January 2007, participants in the training schools included over 700 candidates, campaign managers and supporters, of whom about half have been women. In addition to formal training sessions, IRI organized one-on-one consultations throughout the country through its partner offices in the north and south of Jordan. Most participants in these consultations were women.

¶4. (SBU) A number of women candidates are applying their IRI training experiences directly in their campaigns. These women candidates include Besma Al Khulaifat (running for council member in District 5 in Zarqa), Aminah Mahasneh (for council member in Naseem near Jerash), Rana Hajayeh (for Mayor in Al Hassa near Tafileh), Khaloud Masarwah (for council member in Ayoun near Ajloun), and Bushra Razzi (for council member in Greater Amman). They have incorporated issue identification, message development, campaign stump speeches, voter targeting/outreach and get-out-the-vote techniques in their campaigns.

¶5. (SBU) Furthermore, the Jordanian government's MCC-funded country threshold program administered by USAID supported the Municipal Election Voter Education Support project for the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW). The project supported the JNCW's efforts to increase citizen participation in the election with an emphasis on women and youth by establishing a country-wide municipal election education information telephone line, and a voter outreach campaign targeting women under the slogan, "My Home, My Municipality, My Country - Voting is My Duty." As part of the campaign, the country was plastered with posters that said, "With you not against you, women want their place - not your place - vote for women."

¶6. (SBU) Additionally, the local representative of the

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MEPI-funded Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) mentored two female candidates for municipal council elections, Iman Al Hussein in Salt and Kaltham Muraish in Amman. Both participated in FDD's "MENA Institute for Women Candidates" in Istanbul in April.

Individual Stories - Opportunities

¶7. (SBU) Embassy has been in contact with several women candidates in the run-up to the elections. These candidates have brought a variety of experiences and assets to this election. Some seek to leverage an extensive family or tribal base; some have turned to grassroots campaigning using community service organizations to spread their message; and others have prior experience in municipal politics as previously appointed or elected council members.

¶8. (C) Rana Hajayeh, running for mayor of Al Hassa in the Tafileh governorate, was appointed mayor of the same town in ¶2003. Her brother claimed she has the support of 2700 of the 3000 registered voters in Al Hassa.

¶9. (C) In Zarqa, Besma Al Khulaifat made an alliance with mayoral candidate Ali Khalayleh with whom she shares a service-oriented outlook. Khulaifat reportedly agreed to bring 600 family votes to Khalayleh in exchange for his support of her campaign in Zarqa's fifth district. While Khalayleh is unlikely to take the mayoralty, his family is well represented in Khulaifat's district and may bring her the votes she will need to secure a quota seat (ref D).

¶10. (C) Resmia Abd Guguzu made a similar deal with the mayoral front runner in Ajloun. Abd Guguzu used IRI-sponsored training and seminars as a window to introduce her ideas to the mayoral candidate and lobby him for his support. Her 500 family votes will likely not be the

deciding factor for his race, but she is confident his votes will carry her onto the council and he will have earned an important ally in the process.

Individual Stories - Challenges

¶11. (SBU) While enthusiasm is high among women candidates and the quota has opened up new opportunities, traditional cultural biases and family/tribal dynamics still present challenges for many women.

¶12. (SBU) Abeer Masarweh participated in IRI training and had anticipated competing in the election. Yet when a male member of her tribe declared his candidacy, he father initially forbade her from running against him. While she would need literally a handful of votes to win the quota seat and her candidacy would have little impact on her kinsman, the potential for family division was real. A social worker who works for IRI was able to discuss with the father his concerns and convince him to reconsider. After consulting with his family members, the father agreed to allow his daughter to run.

¶13. (SBU) A colleague of Masarweh's in neighboring Ma'erid Municipality was not as fortunate. As of two weeks before the election, no women had expressed an intention to run. Thus this aspiring candidate could win the quota seat with only her own vote. Again, cultural sensitivities would not allow her family to endorse her candidacy "against" another distant family member. For her family, the chance of family disunity was not worth the risk. She will sit out this election.

¶14. (SBU) The indomitable Faiza Al Na'imi has experience running in past elections, unfortunately much of it negative. After running for mayor of the North Baadia town of Hoshia in 1999 against her family's wishes, family members allegedly tried to kill her, spraying gasoline on her face and attempting to set her on fire. Al Na'imi ran for Parliament in 2003, but her campaign team -- whom she hired at a cost of nearly USD 20,000 -- deceived her and instead told voters she had withdrawn from the race. Yet Al Na'imi is running for mayor again, having registered several hundred voters in her expansive and remote area, and is confident of success.

Comment: Small But Important Steps Forward,
Regardless of Outcome

¶15. (SBU) In a conversation with poloff, an IRI contract trainer endorsed his female trainees as "the future of Jordan"; talented, dedicated, and ready to adopt best practices -- more so than their male counterparts. As described above, women candidates face serious challenges in

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this largely traditional society. Regardless, the new quota law and active participation by women in these elections are important steps forward towards a more inclusive Jordanian political system that makes use of the talents of all of its citizens.

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Hale